

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, EAID, TH

SUBJ: MEDIA ACCESS TO BASES IN THAILAND

REF: A. STATE AIDAC 21152

B. SECSTATE 002694

C. BANGKOK 2553

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT'S DETERMINATION ALLOWING CONTINUATION OF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID TO THAILAND UNDER SECTION 29 OF 1973 FAA AMENDMENTS STILL LEAVES OPEN INTERPRETATION OF LEGISLATIVE INTENT AND PARAMETERS OF REQUIREMENT FOR ACCESS TO THAI BASES USED BY US FORCES. EMBASSY REQUESTS GUIDANCE AND PROPOSES GROUND RULES. END SUMMARY

1. WE WERE PLEASED TO RECEIVE WORD OF THE PRESIDENT'S JANUARY 28 DETERMINATION (REF A) LIFTING THE SUSPENSION ON AID TO THAILAND INVOKED BY SECTION 29 OF THE DECEMBER 1973 AMENDMENTS TO THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT. HOWEVER, US AND RTG PRACTICE MAY CONTINUE TO LEAVE THAILAND SUSCEPTIBLE TO LOSS OF ALL ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID IF AMERICAN NEWSMEN COMPLAIN ABOUT LIMITATIONS ON THEIR ACCESS TO CONFIDENTIAL

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MILITARY BASES IN THAILAND (REF. C).

2. USG ITSELF HAS SOMETIMES BEEN RELUCTANT IN PAST TO APPROVE MEDIA VISITS TO BASES IN THAILAND. ALTHOUGH AUTHORITY TO APPROVE SUCH REQUESTS FOR REFERRAL TO THE THAI GOVERNMENT HAS NOW BEEN DELEGATED TO CINCPAC PUBLIC AFFAIRS LIAISON OFFICER IN BANGKOK (REF. B) WASHINGTON HAS RESEVED TO ITSELF THE RIGHT TO OVERRIDE DECISONS TAKEN IN BANGKOK.

3. RTG HAS OFTEN BEEN SLOW TO APPROVE MEDIA VISITS; INTERNAL CLEARANCE PROCEDURES ARE TIME-CONSUMING, THAI OFFICIALS FEEL NO URGENCY IN RESPONDING TO FOREIGN MEDIA REQUESTS, AND HIGHER AUTHORITIES VIEW AMERICAN NEWSMEN AS "BAD NEWS" (WITH A FEW NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS). IN SEVERAL CASES IT HAS BEEN NECESSARY TO INTERVENE AT HIGH LEVEL AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR TO SECURE THE FINAL RTG APPROVAL; IN SOME INSTANCES THE PROCEDURE HAS SO DELAYED ADVANCE NOTIFICATION TO THE CORRESPONDENTS AS TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF VISITORS, AND HAS PRACTICALLY ANNULLED THE USEFULNESS OF THE APPROVED VISIT. WE CONSIDER TEN WORKDAYS MINIMUM PROCESSING TIME FOR RTG APPROVAL.

4. WE HAVE POINTED OUT THE TERMS OF SECTION 29 TO RTG OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH APPROVING PRESS VISITS, AND THAT HAS BEEN A CONSIDERATION IN THE APPROVALS WHICH WE HAVE RECEIVED ALREADY THIS YEAR (TWO VISITS TO NKP AND ONE TO UDORN). HOWEVER, UNDUE EMPHASIS ON THIS POINT IS APT TO PROVOKE AN ADVERSE REACTION, POSSIBLY WITH REGARD TO SPECIFIC APPROVAL OF PRESS VISITS, BUT MORE PROBABLY IN MATTERS OF GREATER INTRINSIC IMPORTANCE TO THE USG IN RETALIATION FOR WHAT MAY BE VIEWED AS A CONGRESSIONAL DEROGATION OF THAI SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE BASES UTILIZED BY AMERICAN FORCES.

5. THERE ARE VERY FEW AMERICAN NEWSMEN REGULARLY RESIDENT IN BANGKOK. VISITORS FROM SAIGON, HONG KONG, SINGAPORE OR EVEN FURTHER AFLIED DESIRE PROMPT CLEARANCE TO COVER A SPECIFIC STORY; RELATIVELY FEW BUREAUS ARE PREPARED TO LEAVE A NEWSMAN IN THAILAND FOR TWO WEEKS WAITING FOR APPROVAL, OR TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO RETUNING ON A DATE AS MUCH AS TWO WEEKS AWAY.

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6. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN NO SERIOUS CONTROVERSIES WITH PRESS REPRESENTATIVES HERE IN RECENT MONTHS, WE ANTICIPATE POSSIBILITY OF MAJOR FLAP IF MEDIA HOME OFFICES OR OVERSEAS REPRESENTATIVES ATTEMPT TO USE SECTION 29 TO FORCE THEIR WAY IN, OVER PROBABLE US OR RTG RESERVATIONS, TO COVER: A) MACTHAI TRAINING & LOGISTICS DETACHMENT AT UDORN, CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN TRAINING OF LAO AND

KHMER AIR FORCE PERSONNEL; B) AIR AMERICA AT UDORN, ENGAGED IN SUPPORT OF THAI VOLUNTEERS IN LAOS AND MAINTENANCE FOR RLAf AND US TRAINING FOR KAF; OR C) USSAG AT NKP, THE CENTRAL COMMAND FOR SUPPORT TO THE GKR AND FOR POSSIBLE RESUMPTION OF THE AIR WAR OVER INDOCHINA. OF THESE, RTG IS MOST SENSITIVE OVER USSAG. THAI MILITARY HAVE ALSO SHOWN CONSIDERABLE SENSITIVITY ABOUT AIR AMERICA ACTIVITIES RECENTLY. SEVERAL US MILITARY INTELLIGENCE STATIONS IN THAILAND HAVE ALSO BEEN CONSIDERED OFF-LIMITS FOR NEWSMEN.

7. WE SUGGEST FOLLOWING GUIDELINES FOR CONSIDERATION BY CONCERNED WASHINGTON AGENCIES:

A) ACCESS TO INTELLIGENCE STATIONS SUCH AS RAMASUN AND KO KHA WILL BE DENIED ON BASIS THEY ARE NOT COVERED BY SECTION 29 THEY ARE US BUILT AND OPERATED, BUT FUNCTIONS DO NOT INCLUDE THE LAUNCHING OF OPERATIONS. AS FALLBACK, WE WOULD INVOKE SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS. IN ANY CASE, DENIAL OF ACCESS WILL COME FROM THE AMERICAN, NOT THE THAI, SIDE.

B) ACCESS TO SENSITIVE ACTIVITIES, SUCH AS THOSE LISTED IN PARA 6 ABOVE, CAN STILL BE DENIED ON BASIS THAT ACCESS TO A BASE DOES NOT IMPLY PERMISSION TO VISIT EACH AND EVERY ACTIVITY ON BASE. FOR INSTANCE, VISITS TO NKP WILL BE LIMITED TO JOINT CASUALTY RESOLUTION CENTER, WHILE USSAG IS CONSIDERED OFF LIMITS FOR SECURITY REASONS.

C) VISITS TO ANY BASE WILL NOT NORMALLY BE SCHEDULED ON A FREQUENT OR REGULAR REPETITIVE BASIS ON THE ARGUMENT THAT PRESS VISITS CAUSE INTERRUPTION TO OPERATIONS AND TRAINING
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SCHEDULES.

D) EFFORT WILL CONTINUE TO BE MADE TO COMBINE VISIT REQUESTS AND TO NOTIFY MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES OF VISITS APPROVED IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC REQUESTS. IN GENERAL, WE WILL SEEK TO AVOID INDIVIDUAL VISITS, PARTICULARLY ON SHORT NOTICE, BECAUSE OF STAFF LIMITATIONS AS WELL AS FOR PURPOSE OF ENCOURAGING STRAIGHT REPORTING.

E) NORMAL LEAD TIME FOR REQUESTING A VISIT WILL BE ESTABLISHED AS NOT LATER THAN TEN WORKING DAYS. MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE ADVISED THAT THEY SHOULD APPLY AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE BY MESSAGE WELL IN ADVANCE OF THEIR ARRIVAL TO COVER A SOTRY; SIMPLE DELAY IN SUBMITTING APPLICATIONS UNTIL AFTER ARRIVAL IN BANGKOK FOR A BRIEF STAY WILL NOT

BE CONSIDERED A LEGITIMATE REASON FOR SPECIAL URGENT
CONSIDERATION.

8. ACTION REQUESTED: MISSION REQUESTS WASHINGTON GUIDANCE,
BASED ON SUGGESTIONS ABOVE, REGARDING FUTURE HANDLING OF RE-
QUESTS FROM AMERICAN MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES TO VISIT US MILITARY
UNITS OPERATING FROM ROYAL THAI BASES BUILT AT USG EXPENSE.

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